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"Robert Frost" The Approach....

Robert Frost: The Approachable Poet For Beginners and Beyond

An Honors Thesis

by

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Introduction

This is a work of regret. It is my hope that with the use of this guide, fewer high school students will graduate with the same regret I felt at my high school graduation. I felt like I had no skills with which to approach poetic interpretation, and I doubt my English literature teachers had any more confidence regarding their students' readiness to interpret all genres of literature.

I attended a small high school that had very few advanced level classes. Even within the curriculum of the upperclass advanced courses, the genre of poetry was largely overlooked. I do not think this was due to lack of appreciation for poetry on the teacher's part. More likely, teachers' schedules did not allow them time to create effective lessons plans to use with students already fearful of approaching poetry as a whole. This uncorrected gap in the curriculum became more than a regrettable absence as I advanced to college, and being able to approach, interpret, and discuss poetry on even basic levels became a necessity.

After initially hesitating to approach poetry, I learned that most verse was accessible once I overcame some common misconceptions about verse with which many students struggle. First, just as a line of poetry doesn't always extend to the end of the page, themes, allusions, and connections between images are often left incomplete for the reader to finish. This means that while I read short stories once or twice to fully comprehend them, a poem often needs to be read four or more times by a competent student before the work is completely understood. I thought that if I didn't understand what I read the first two times through, I must be stupid, "too stupid to read poetry," a group many high school students put themselves into. Once I understood that poetry is a concentration of images, I was able to slow down and enjoy the increasing levels of understanding that came with each successive reading.

Second, I discovered rhyme and meter are not the same thing. I had many friends who wrote "unrhymed poetry." In actuality, they had not written poetry, but made lists of images or emotions. One can clearly illustrate in any of Frost's unrhymed poems, that even though the ends of the lines are not phonetically similar, there is an underlying rhythm that drives the poem and contributes to its tone, exposition, and theme. Once a student can use meter as an interpretive clue, many in-depth questions can be answered concerning a work's meaning.

Finally, good poetry achieves effects of synecdoche and permanence more often than effective prose does. Poetry has the ability to use the particular to illustrate the collective more clearly than does prose. If the entirety of life is likened to an iceberg,

prose can be said to precisely describe only the tip that comes out of the water. Poetry, often by mentioning the tip and reflecting on the water around it, can allude to the mass of ice below the surface, the root of the iceberg's existence.

As for permanence, any student can easily name five to ten of their favorite poems by modern writers. Many teachers are fond of using lyrics from popular music to initially convince students that they have an interest in poetry and are indeed able to understand its message. *A song can bring to mind past situations and emotions that can no longer be recalled by any other method, so can poetry.* This may explain the popularity throughout the ages of poems dealing with powerful subjects and emotions like love, the struggle for identity and independence, historical events, and the drama involved in many aspects of everyday life.

Because these revelations were important to me in my early struggles to learn about poetry, I have included these elements in the study questions for each poem, striving to achieve increasing levels of understanding on the part of the student. Each set of exercises following the poems is designed in a progressive manner, so that responding to the first questions allows the student to piece together answers to more difficult problems introduced later. The first questions concern basic mechanics, defining words that may be unfamiliar, examining tone, fundamental structure, and overall meaning of the work. The next questions ask the student to become involved in the basic interpretation of the poem. What is Frost trying to say in the details of his lines? The last questions for each poem try to coax the student into applying the poem to his or her own experiences. Once a student identifies with a work, *the interest level and motivation to continue studying the poem also increases.*

Each page is provided ready to photocopy and use in-class or as homework. The questions concerning each work can also be a starting point for stimulating classroom discussion and group interpretation of a work. Hopefully, some combination of the two uses will initiate students' interest and then challenge them on a personal level. After my goals for the project were set, I began to look for an appropriate poet to use in the study guide.

I chose the works of Robert Frost because he is a very skilled contemporary American poet that can be understood on many levels. This means that while some students are challenged by the initial concepts of poetic interpretation, their classmates can move on to deal with more advanced concepts without creating disparity in the classroom. His clear images of the New England countryside, drawn from his own experiences, are easily envisioned by students first studying poems. Students who have taken American

history classes will feel more connected to his process of growing up and becoming a poet than they will be trying to picture Shakespeare in his hometown. Also, I think many teenagers will identify with his repeating theme of an individual struggling to find meaning in an apathetic world.

The poems are arranged in order from most easily interpreted to the more difficult. Frost's earlier, most popular works tend to be the most difficult to explicate. The later works are sometimes more clear and therefore begin section two, but their order is merely a suggestion, and not at all a requirement for classroom use. Ultimately, this guide is designed to be useful whether you have two days, two weeks, or two months to teach poetry to freshman or seniors.

Best of luck. Although initially daunting, the world of poetry is a treasure once a student learns how to navigate through it. Hopefully, by starting on the familiar grounds of Northeastern America, we can open a student's eyes to the wonders of poetry from many different times and places.

History of Frost's Life and Discussion of his Themes

Although considered a New England poet, Robert Frost was born in San Francisco on March 26, 1874. When the welfare of his newborn son became questionable, his father pointed a gun at the doctor who was delivering the baby and said, "You won't survive unless my baby does." Apparently everything turned out fine, and the baby was named Robert Lee Frost after the great Civil War general. Mr. Frost's influence on the boy diminished after this point as his mother taught him at home, a practice he would continue with his own children many years later. Robert Frost often points to a relationship between the earthly and the divine in his works, displaying the influence his mother's Presbyterian beliefs had on her son.

Robert Frost attended Dartmouth, but left it for Harvard, which he disliked also. He graduated from neither, but did believe strongly in the value of a good day's work. He proceeded through a series of jobs including time spent as a bobbin boy in a sewing factory, making shoes, editing a country newspaper, teaching school at his mother's schoolhouse, and farming. Eventually, he moved the family to England and there, at the age of 40, published his first collection of works, A Boy's Will in 1914. After also achieving success with North of Boston, he moved back to the states and settled on a New Hampshire farm. Looking back on his career, his only disappointment was never winning a Nobel prize, although he was honored with four Pulitzer Prizes and multiple honorary degrees in the States and England.

Many of Frost's themes touch on the individual's struggle to come to terms with the world while feeling isolated and alone. He used everyday scenes to show the struggles that affect all people on a daily basis. Some of his favorite vehicles to illustrate this were the seasonal cycle, the balance between life and death in everyday life, the process of love, and challenges and triumphs of the human spirit. There was a constant struggle in his works like "Mending Wall" to balance the walls that bring a person individuality against the loneliness and isolation inherent in those walls.

Repeatedly Frost's works feature internal conflicts. Individuals seek answers from other human beings, Nature, and their own inner understanding of themselves in a quest to justify the principles that underlie their actions. Although Frost features many characters who are essentially lonely and dependent on others for acceptance and affection, these same people will reject that support from others if it means compromising their individuality. Frost echoes his Romantic contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson in this view of human nature, but is more judgmental toward Mother Nature. He allows for divine

intervention in human relationships, but often suggests that God, if there is one, has completely abandoned natural events.

For as much as Frost writes about individuals trying to understand their universe, he intentionally obscured the situations and lessons of some of his works saying, "These poems are written in parable so the wrong people won't understand and so be saved." For example, in "Mending Wall," where there is a struggle introduced concerning the value of barriers between people and societies, Frost repeats "good fences make good neighbors" leading one to believe that he is either supporting this view or mocking it when in actuality, he makes no judgment whatsoever at the end of the poem. "The Road Not Taken" was actually a satirical jibe at a friend, Edward Thomas. Thomas was extremely indecisive and often changed his version of an event to attribute a coincidental choice to his own wisdom.

Especially later in his career, as his poetic skills declined, Frost was fond of mocking anyone who thought easy solutions existed for social problems or who waited for the world to be destroyed in atomic warfare. He relentlessly attacked hypocritical voices or postured speakers who made little practical sense.

Frost dealt with the intellectual struggles of humans. He had little use for the pompous ramblings of self-appointed leaders of the time, but rather strove to capture the voice and rhythms of average speech. He referred to poetry as "organized violence in language" and advised poetry readers to pay no attention to preserving the lines of a work while reading it. He suggested that anyone who read the poetry in a conversational tone would automatically bring the rhythm and rhyme of the piece out of its own merit. Poetry, according to him, has to be read with emotion, because the lines will not create emotion of their own accord.

He best illustrates this concept in the phrase "sentence sounds." He likened good rhythm in poetry to listening to a conversation through a door. Although the exact words may not be distinguishable, the emotions can be inferred from the pace and tone of the thoughts being spoken. Frost claimed that the most original writer captured sentences fresh from talk, but of all the instruction Frost gave on the requirements of good poetry, this passage from "The Figure a Poem Makes" is probably the most often quoted. "The figure is the same as for love. . . . It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life--not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion."

A Cabin In The Clearing

MIST I don't believe the sleepers in this house
Know where they are.

SMOKE They've been here long enough
To push the woods back from around the house
And part them in the middle with a path.

MIST And still I doubt if they know where they are.
And I begin to fear they never will.
All they maintain the path for is the comfort
Of visiting with the equally bewildered.
Nearer in plight their neighbors are than distance.

SMOKE I am the guardian wraith of starlit smoke
That leans out this and that way from their chimney.
I will not have their happiness despaired of.

MIST No one--not I--would give them up for lost
Simply because they don't know where they are.
I am the damper counterpart of smoke,
That gives off from a garden ground at night
But lifts no higher than a garden grows.
I cotton to their landscape. That's who I am.
I am no further from their fate than you are.

SMOKE They must by now have learned the native tongue.
Why don't they ask the Red Man who they are?

MIST They often do, and none the wiser for it.
So they also ask philosophers
Who come to look in on them from the pulpit.
They will ask anyone there is to ask--
In the fond faith accumulated fact
Will of itself take fire and light the world up.
Learning has been a part of their religion.

SMOKE If the day ever comes when they know who
They are, they may know better where they are.
But who they are is too much to believe--
Either for them or the onlooking world.
They are too sudden to be credible.

MIST Listen, they murmur talking in the dark
 On what should be their daylong theme continued.
 Putting the lamp out has not put their thought out.
 Let us pretend the dewdrops from the eaves
 Are you and I eavesdropping on their unrest--
 A mist and smoke eavesdropping on a haze--
 And see if we can tell the bass from the soprano.

*Than smoke and mist who better could appraise
 The kindred spirit of inner haze?*

1. Within the poem, how is mist described?
2. Within the poem, how is smoke described?
3. Who have the cabin-dwellers looked to so far in their search for meaning?
4. Where does smoke think the answer lies?
5. What does the mist think happens after the lights go out?
6. What does smoke want to protect for the cabin people?
7. What does line nine mean?
8. Why would smoke want to protect the people more than mist would?
9. Why is their identity "too much to be believed"(line 31)?
10. What is the mist listening for when trying to "tell the bass from the soprano"?

Bond and Free

Love has earth to which she clings
 With hills and circling arms about--
 Wall within wall to shut fear out.
 But Thought has need of no such things,
 For Thought has a pair of dauntless wings.

On snow and sand and turf, I see
 Where Love has left a printed trace
 With straining in the world's embrace,
 And such is Love and glad to be.
 But Thought has shaken his ankles free.

Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom
 And sits in Sirius' disc all night,
 Till day makes him retrace his flight,
 With smell of burning on every plume,
 Back past the sun to an earthly room.

His gains in heaven are what they are.
 Yet some say Love by being thrall
 And simply staying possesses all
 In several beauty that Thought fares far
 To find fused in another star.

1. What is "Sirius's disc"?
2. What does "thrall" mean?
3. What allusions does the third stanza give to the story of Ithacus?
4. What are the qualities of Love?
5. What are the qualities of Thought?
6. Does this poem favor Love or Thought?
7. Which of the two is Bond and which is Free?
8. What is a foil in terms of literature? How do the two act as foils to each other?
9. Why are the two qualities appropriately categorized? (Why couldn't they be oppositely bond and free?)
10. What qualities or emotions are best limited to earth? Which ones can't be limited?

The Aim Was Song

Before man came to blow it right
The wind once blew itself untaught,
And did its loudest day and night
In any rough place where it caught.

Man came to tell it what was wrong:
It hadn't found the place to blow;
It blew too hard--the aim was song.
And listen--how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,
And held it long enough for north
To be converted into south,
And then by measure blew it forth.

By measure. It was word and note,
The wind the wind had meant to be--
A little through the lips and throat.
The aim was song--the wind could see.

1. What is the process being described in stanza three, especially the north and south metaphor?
2. Is it egotistical to imply that man is teaching Nature? Why or why not?
3. Is this poem describing chaos or order? Why?
4. Which stanzas are the man's and which belong to wind?
5. How is the wind described before human intervention?
6. How is the wind described after human contact?
7. How could wind and song be describing thoughts and a poem?
8. What do you enjoy that was created by humans?
9. What do you enjoy that is purely a product of nature?

A Mood Apart

Once down on my knees to growing plants
I prodded the earth with a lazy tool
In time with a medley of sotto chants;
But becoming aware of some boys from school
Who had stopped outside the fence to spy,
I stopped my song and almost heart,
For any eye is an evil eye
That looks in onto a mood apart.

1. Draw a line between the three parts of this poem. How does the mood change between the three sections?
2. Why does the speaker stop his work?
3. What kind of tune does "sotto chants" bring to mind in line three?
4. What words present an image of church, spirituality, or worship?
5. Why would Frost want the gardener to have a spiritual experience in his work?
6. What experiences do you consider sacred?
7. Why is it important to have privacy when doing certain things? What are those things?

Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee
And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me.

1. What is the main emotion in line one?
2. What is the main emotion in line two?
3. What could the little jokes in line one be?
4. What could the big joke in line two be?
5. How reverent is the speaker to God? What are the clues of his reverence?
Irreverence?
6. Frost said this was a couplet in defense of religion. Do you agree or disagree?
7. Frost said, "This one seems to release something wicked in people." Do you agree or disagree? How do you feel about it?

The Lockless Door

It went many years,
But at last came a knock,
And I thought of the door
With no lock to lock.

I blew out the light,
I tiptoed the floor,
And raised both hands
In prayer to the door,

But the knock came again.
My window was wide;
I climbed on the sill
And descended outside.

Back over the sill
I bade a "Come in"
To whatever the knock
At the door might have been.

So at a knock
I emptied my cage
To hide in the world
And alter with age.

1. How does the length of these lines contribute differently to this poem than the longer lines in Frost's more serious works?
2. What is the tone of this poem?
3. What does the speaker seem to be with the use of the cage image in the last stanza?
4. What kind of change could the speaker undergo in order to change the confrontation the next time it happens?
5. Why does the speaker pray? What is he wishing for?
6. Why does the speaker run from the knocker, yet invite it into the house as he leaves?
7. What are you afraid to face in your life?

Rose Pogonias

A saturated meadow,
Sun-shaped and jewel-small,
A circle scarcely wider
Than the trees around were tall:
Where winds were quite excluded,
And the air was stifling sweet
With the breath of many flowers,--
A temple of the heat.

There we bowed us in the burning,
As the sun's right worship is,
To pick where none could miss them
A thousand orchids;
For though the grass was scattered,
Yet every second spear
Seem tipped with wings of color,
That tinged the atmosphere.

We raised a simple prayer
Before we left the spot,
That in the general mowing
That place might be forgot;
Or if not all so favored,
Obtain such grace of hours,
That none should mow the grass there
While so confused with flowers.

1. Name some types of flowers that you think were in this clearing.
2. What are lines 13-16 saying about the number of flowers in the clearing?
3. What do the visitors wish for before they leave?
4. If they think the spot is so pretty with all the flowers, why do they pick so many?
5. What words does Frost use to evoke an image of worship and prayer?
6. How fast does time move in this piece? How does that help the theme?
7. Name a place of natural beauty that you find comforting.
8. Do you like to take mementos from that place?

A Passing Glimpse

I often see flowers from a passing car
That are gone before I can tell what they are.

I want to get out of the train and go back
To see what they were beside the track.

I name all the flowers I am sure they weren't:
Not fireweed loving where woods have burnt--

Not bluebells gracing a tunnel mouth--
Not lumpvine living on sand and drouth.

Was something brushed across my mind
That no one on earth will ever find?

1. Does the speaker feel isolated? Is that important to the poem?
2. How convinced is the speaker that the world he sees is real? Why is he or is he not convinced?
3. Does he list any concrete evidence to base his intuitions of the flowers' names on?
4. Is it better to rely on instinct or concrete evidence when judging intuition?
5. Is the speaker getting an adequate picture of the countryside beside the tracks even without many specific details? Why or Why not?
6. If you were the traveler, would you want to go back and see what is really on the side of the tracks? Why or why not?
7. What problem is presented in the last couplet?
8. Do you ever feel like you are being bombarded with information so quickly that you forget some unique or profound thoughts? When does this happen?
9. How is this poem pertinent to the problems of "The Information Age" and current mass media?

Two Leading Lights

I never happened to contrast
The two in the celestial cast
Whose prominence has been so vast.
The Sun is satisfied with days.
He never has in any phase
That I have heard of shone at night.
And yet he is a power of light
And could in one burst overwhelm
And dayify the darkest realm
By right of eminent domain.
He has the greatness to refrain.
The Moon for all her light and grace
Has never learned to know her place.
The notedest astronomers
Have set the dark aside for hers.
But there are many nights, though clear,
She doesn't bother to appear.
Some lunatic or lunar whim
Will bring her out, diminished dim,
To set herself beside the Sun,
As Sheba came to Solomon.
It may be charitably guessed
Comparison is not her quest.
Some rumor of his wishing ring
That changes winter into spring
Has brought her merely visiting,
An irresponsible divinity
Presuming on her femininity.

1. Is the Sun viewed favorably or unfavorably?
2. Name some of the Sun's characteristics. What strong words are used to refer to the Sun?
3. Is the Moon viewed favorably or unfavorably?
4. Name some of the Moon's characteristics. What strong words are used to refer to the Moon?
5. What is the poet's attitude toward women in general based on this poem?
6. This poem was written before the women's rights movement. Is it still good literature today? Why or why not?
7. What inanimate objects do you refer to as masculine or feminine?

Trespass

No, I had set no prohibiting sign,
 And yes, my land was hardly fenced.
 Nevertheless the land was mine:
 I was being trespassed on and against.

Whoever the surly freedom took
 Of such an unaccountable stay,
 Busying by my woods and brook
 Gave me a strangely restless day.

He might be opening leaves of stone,
 The picture book of the trilobite,
 For which the region round was known,
 And in which there was little property right.

'Twas not the value I stood to lose
 In specimen crab in specimen rock,
 But his ignoring what was whose
 That made me look again at the clock.

Then came his little acknowledgment:
 He asked for a drink at the kitchen door,
 An errand he may have had to invent,
 But it made my property mine once more.

1. What does surly mean?
2. What is a trilobite?
3. Why is the landowner anxious about having the man on his property?
4. What does the landowner not care if the visitor takes?
5. How did the request for water make the speaker a landowner once again?
6. Do you agree with Frost that people have to acknowledge that you own some things before they can actually belong to you? Why or why not?
7. What parts of your life do other people need to acknowledge before you can own them?
8. This poem is about unspoken boundaries. Do you think it is a more serious offense to break an unspoken rules? How do you know those rules exist? How do you let other people know when you have an unspoken rule?

On A Bird Singing In Its Sleep

A bird half wakened in the lunar noon
Sang halfway through its little inborn tune.
Partly because it sang but once all night
And that from no especial bush's height,
Partly because it sang ventriloquist
And had the inspiration to desist
Almost before the prick of hostile ears,
It ventured less in peril than appears.
It could not have come down to us so far,
Through the interstices of things ajar
On the long bead chain of repeated birth,
To be a bird while we are men on earth,
If singing out of sleep and dream that way
Had made it much more easily a prey.

1. Draw a line between the lines in the poem where Frost sets the scene and where he poses the question.
2. When did the bird sing?
3. What reasons does the speaker give for liking the bird?
4. What is an interstice?
5. What would have prevented the questions the bird raised from reaching its human listeners (see lines 9-14)?
6. What is Frost implying by using "down. . . so far" in line nine?
7. Nature is teaching humans in this poem. Can you think of a Frost poem in which people teach Nature?
8. Why would the bird sing when it is faced with predators and other dangers?
9. What do you do to escape your problems?
10. When have you come to a better understanding of a problem through a person, animal or object outside yourself?

Blue-Butterfly Day

It is blue-butterfly day here in spring,
And with these sky-flakes down in flurry on flurry
There is more unmixed color on the wing
Than flowers will show for days unless they hurry.

But these are flowers that fly and all but sing:
And now from having ridden out desire
They lie closed over in the wind and cling
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire.

1. The blue butterflies only have one day to call their own. What does this tell you about their existence?
2. What are the butterflies described to be like in line two?
3. Why does Frost set up a competition between the butterflies and flowers? Who is winning?
4. Why aren't the flowers all one color? What makes them mixed?
5. Where do the butterflies end up?
6. Is this a cruel fate considering their beauty? Why or why not?
7. The images in this poem are vivid. List some words used to draw clear pictures.
8. What do you enjoy that is only temporary? Would you want it to be permanent if you could choose or would you still let it be temporary?

Good-by and Keep Cold

This saying good-by on the edge of the dark
 And the cold to an orchard so young in the bark
 Reminds me of all that can happen to harm
 An orchard away at the end of the farm
 All winter, cut off by a hill from the house.
 I don't want it girdled by rabbit and mouse,
 I don't want it dreamily nibbled for browse
 By deer, and I don't want it budded by grouse.
 (If certain it wouldn't be idle to call
 I'd summon grouse, rabbit, and deer to the wall
 and warn them away with a stick for a gun.)
 I don't want it stirred by the heat of the sun.
 (We made it secure against being, I hope,
 By setting it out on a northerly slope.)
 No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm;
 But one thing about it, it musn't get warm.
 "How often already you've had to be told,
 Keep cold, young orchard. Good-by and keep cold.
 Dread fifty above more than fifty below."
 I have to be gone for a season or so.
 My business awhile is with different trees,
 Less carefully nurtured, less fruitful than these,
 And such as is done to their wook with an ax--
 Maples and birches and tamaracks.
 I wish I could promise to lie in the night
 And think of an orchard's arboreal plight
 When slowly (and nobody comes with a light)
 Its heart sinks lower under the sod.
 But something has to be left to God.

1. What is a grouse?
2. Why is it necessary for the trees to stay cold?
3. The speaker lists many concerns, but in the end says it must be left to God. What is Frost saying about Man's control over Nature?
4. Underline specifics from the poem about what the man wants to happen to the orchard.
5. Circle specifics from the poem about what the man doesn't want to happen to the orchard.
6. The speaker is pretty brusque when stating his concern for the trees. Is he more compassionate to humans? Why or Why not?
7. Does Frost still communicate his point even though his tone is less serious?
8. Frost and his wife often fought about religion. Judging by this poem, do you think Robert was the atheist or the religious man? Why?
9. Have you ever wished for something that you had no control over. How did it

turn out?

10. Do you treat a pet or plant as if it is human? How realistic is this speaker's attitude towards his orchard?

Not To Keep

They sent him back to her. The letter came
 Saying. . . And she could have him. And before
 She could be sure there was no hidden ill
 Under the formal writing, he was there
 Living. They gave him back to her alive--
 How else? They are not known to send the dead.--
 And not disfigured visibly. His face?
 His hands? She had to look, to look and ask,
 "What is it, Dear?" And she had given all
 And still she had all--they had--they the lucky!
 Wasn't she glad now? Everything seemed won,
 And all the rest for them permissible ease.
 She had to ask, "What was it, dear?"

"Enough,
 Yet not enough. A bullet through and through,
 High in the breast. Nothing but what good care
 And medicine and rest, and you a week,
 Can cure me of to go again." The same
 Grim giving to do over for them both.
 She dared no more than ask him with her eyes
 How was it with him for a second trial.
 And with his eyes he asked her not to ask.
 They had given him back to her, but not to keep.

1. What does this man do? Where is he going back to?
2. What effect is created by the cutting of sentences and thoughts across lines of the poem and non-standard syntax of the first three lines?
3. What is implied by the change of verb tense in the question asked in lines nine and thirteen?
4. In your own words, translate the thought expressed in lines nine and ten.
5. In your own words, translate the thought expressed in lines thirteen and fourteen.
6. When does the pronoun "they" start to refer to a different group than it did initially? How does this effect contribute to the poem?
7. How are the woman's desires conflicting in this story?
8. Is this poem anti-war? Why or why not? If you think it is, why is it effective? Is it more effective than a direct protest would be? In what ways?
9. When have you been asked to do something that will ultimately hurt you? How did you handle the situation?

To A Moth Seen In Winter

Here's first a gloveless hand warm from my pocket,
 A perch and resting place 'twixt wood and wood,
 Bright-black-eyed silvery creature, brushed with brown,
 The wings not folded in repose, but spread.
 (Who would you be, I wonder, by those marks
 If I had moths to friend as I have flowers?)
 And now pray tell what lured you with false hope
 To make the venture of eternity
 And seek the love of kind in wintertime?
 But stay and hear me out. I surely think
 You make a labor of flight for one so airy,
 Spending yourself too much in self-support.
 Nor will you find love either, nor love you.
 And what I pity in you is something human,
 The old incurable untimeliness,
 Only begetter of all ills that are.
 But go. You are right. My pity cannot help.
 Go till you wet your pinions and are quenched.
 You must be made more simply wise than I
 To know the hand I stretch impulsively
 Across the gulf of well-nigh everything
 May reach to you, but cannot touch your fate.
 I cannot touch your life, much less can save,
 Who am tasked to save my own a little while.

1. Draw lines between the sections of the poem that set the scene, questions the moth's actions, and gives the moral of the poem.
2. What do lines five and six mean?
3. What does the speaker think is a waste of the moth's energy?
4. What does the speaker think the moth is searching for uselessly?
5. Will the moth die because Nature is cruel or its own instincts are bad?
6. In the end, what reason does the speaker give for letting the moth go its own way?
7. How could the speaker's concern for the moth's life be extended to a God-concern for human life? In your opinion, would this be a true judgment on life?
8. Has someone ever tried to help you when you didn't want help? How did it go?
9. How do you personally decide when to offer someone else your help?

In A Disused Graveyard

The living come with grassy tread
To read the gravestones on the hill;
The graveyard draws the living still,
But never anymore the dead.

The verses in it say and say:
"The ones who living come today
To read the stones and go away
Tomorrow dead will come to stay."

So sure of death the marbles rhyme,
Yet can't help marking all the time
How no one dead will seem to come.
What is it men are shrinking from?

It would be easy to be clever
And tell the stones: Men hate to die
And have stopped dying now forever.
I think they would believe the lie.

1. How does it change the meaning and tone if "still" in line three is used as an adjective or adverb?
2. What does line four tell about the graveyard?
3. What attitude do the gravestones have about death? How does it differ from human attitudes?
4. Why would it be necessary to lie to the stones?
5. What is implied in stanza two about those who visit graveyards?
6. How do you feel in a graveyard? Why?

The Objection To Being Stepped On

At the end of the row
I stepped on the toe
Of an unemployed hoe.
It rose in offense
And struck me a blow
In the seat of my sense.
It wasn't to blame
But I called it a name.
And I must say it dealt
Me a blow that I felt
Like malice pretense.
You may call me a fool,
But was there a rule
The weapon should be
Turned into a tool?
And what do we see?
The first tool I step on
Turned into a weapon.

1. What is the tone of this poem?
2. What is the "seat of my sense" referring to in line six?
3. What does pretense mean?
4. How does the speaker view weapons being used as tools?
5. If this poem were addressed to a political leader, what would it be advising about military readiness?
6. Is Frost effective in trying to put a serious lesson like military theory in a anecdotal poem? Why or why not?
7. Is the hoe effectively personified? Why or why not?
8. What inanimate objects can you think of that can be used to exemplify a lesson?

Neither Far Out Nor In Deep

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way.
They turn their back on the land,
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull;
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;
But wherever the truth may be--
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

1. What does "bar" in line 15 mean?
 2. The viewpoint shifts from the sea to the land. Put a check mark beside each time the view shifts. Why do you think the shifts get faster and faster as the poem progresses?
 3. Underline all the times "look" appears in the poem. Why is it ironic to use that verb so often?
 4. What is the near object mentioned in the poem? The far object mentioned?
 5. Why do the people keep looking if they can't see anything clearly? What does this represent about today's society?
 6. In your opinion, what are the lookers in the poem hoping to find?
 7. In your opinion, do the people ever realize they will not be able to see anything more clearly?
- The meaning of the poem shifts depending on what word is emphasized in the last line.
8. What if "any" is emphasized?
 9. What if "they" is emphasized?
 10. What if "keep" is emphasized?
 11. Define Nihilism. How does this poem represent it?

Desert Places

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
 In a field I looked into going past,
 And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
 But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods arraign it have it--it is theirs.
 All animals are smothered in their lairs.
 I am too absent-spirited to count;
 The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
 Will be more ere it will be less--
 A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
 With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
 Between stars--on stars where no human race is.
 I have it in me so much nearer home
 To scare myself with my own desert places.

1. What image is created by the use of "smothered" in line 6?
2. Is speaker part of scene or isolated from it? What shows this?
3. What is Nature's effect on the speaker?
4. What does line 8 mean?
5. What does the third stanza say about the speaker's life?
6. How does the landscape reflect the speaker's inner emotions?
7. What is the effect of the shift into outer space in the last stanza?
8. How does this woods compare to the landscape in "Stopping By the Woods On a Snowy Evening"?
9. What types of environments make you feel isolated and want to withdraw?

The Onset

Always the same, when on a fated night
 At last the gathered snow lets down as white
 As may be in dark woods, and with a song
 It shall not make again all winter long
 Of hissing on the yet uncovered ground,
 I almost stumble looking up and round,
 As one who overtaken by the end
 Gives up his errand, and lets death descend
 Upon him where he is, with nothing done
 To evil, no important triumph won,
 More than if life had never been begun.

Yet all the precedent is on my side:
 I know that winter death has never tried
 The earth has but failed: the snow may heap
 In long storms an undrifted four feet deep
 As measured against maple, birch, and oak,
 It cannot check the peeper's silver croak;
 And I shall see the snow all go downhill
 In water of a slender April rill
 That flashes tail through last year's withered brake
 And dead weeds, like a disappearing snake.
 Nothing will be left white here but birch,
 And there a clump of houses with a church.

1. What is "death" in line eight? Why does Frost characterize this object in such a way?
2. Write out lines two and three without the line break. Do they make more sense this way? Why would Frost have split the thought between two lines? Is this a weakness of poetry?
3. What season does the first stanza discuss and how is it characterized? Use the poem's words.
4. Write out the second and third lines of the second stanza as well. What is the speaker saying here?
5. What season does the second stanza discuss and how is it characterized? Use the poem's words.
6. What is a "rill"?
7. What is a "brake"?
8. Why does Frost end the poem with the only two white images of non-winter seasons?
9. Which season/stanza of this poem do you remember most? Why?
10. Which season inspires you most? How and why?

Come In

As I came to the edge of the woods,
 Thrush music--hark!
 Now if it was dusk outside,
 Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
 By sleight of wing
 To better perch for the night,
 Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
 That had died in the west
 Still lived for one song more
 In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark
 Thrush music went--
 Almost like a call to come in
 To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:
 I would not come in.
 I meant not even if asked,
 And I hadn't been.

1. What is the "pillared dark" in line 13 referring to?
2. How does the second stanza describe the darkness? Too early for what and too late for what?
3. The speaker is walking in the light, but studying the dark. Which does he prefer? Why?
4. What are the pairs of contrast in this poem?
5. Is it important that the title is "Come In" and not "Go In"? What's the difference between the two?
6. How does this view of the woods differ from the point of view taken in "Stopping By The Woods"?
7. Frost was often known to equate the woods with death. How does this poem fit that?
8. Frost was known for speaking against the Romantic movement at times. If the thrush represents Romanticism and Frost the speaker, how does this poem support his argument?
9. What aspects of your environment most get your attention?
10. Frost's speaker thinks darkness is the right place to lament. What places do you go to when you're feeling a certain way? What do you do there?

Storm Fear

When the wind works against us in the dark,
And pelts with snow
The lower chamber window on the east,
And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,
The beast,
"Come out! Come out!"--
It costs no inward struggle not to go
Ah, no!
I count our strength,
Two and a child,
Those of us not asleep subdued to mark
How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length,--
How drifts are piled,
Dooryard and road unguarded,
Till even the comforting barn grows far away
And my heart owns a doubt
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
And save ourselves unaided.

1. What is the poem's theme? How do the irregular lines and rhythms contribute?
2. What is the speaker most afraid of?
3. There are people in the house awake and sleeping. Who has it better off? Why?
4. What emotion is the snow given?
5. What problem is the speaker facing?
6. Why is that so troublesome to him?
7. The speaker is afraid they will not be able to save themselves without help. What prevents them from getting help?
8. What is this poem saying about the role of a person's home versus Nature?
9. Do specific types of weather put you in particular states of mind? What type of emotions?
10. Have you ever been faced with a question that you were too scared to answer?

7. What does the newlywed couple represent?
8. What is this poem saying about the balance between the couple and the stranger?
9. What would you do if you were the groom?
10. When have you had to choose between your personal life and responsibilities to others?

Misgiving

All crying, "We will go with you, O Wind!"
The foliage follow him, leaf and stem;
But a sleep oppresses them as they go,
And they end by bidding him stay with them.

Since ever they flung abroad in spring
The leaves had promised themselves this flight,
Who now would fain seek sheltering wall,
Or thicket, or hollow place for the night.

And now they answer his summoning blast
With an ever vaguer and vaguer stir,
Or at untmost a little reluctant whirl
That drops them no further than where they were.

I only hope that when I am free
As they are free, to go in quest
Of knowledge beyond the bounds of life
It may not seem better to me to rest.

1. Is the title appropriate for this poem? Why or Why not?
2. What are the first three stanzas telling about the wishes of the leaves?
3. What could the leaves represent?
4. What could the wind represent?
5. How can the leaves' behavior be compared to human behavior?
6. Have you ever wanted to do something and then been disappointed once you got to be a part of the activity?
7. In general, do you think people today are too apathetic?

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay

1. Draw a line between the description of the scene and the lesson for the audience.
2. What does the first line mean?
3. Why is it "hard to hold"?
4. Is Frost suggesting that nothing stays forever or nothing gold stays forever?
5. If gold were also taken to mean money, is it too connected to images of wealth and power to be used referring to something in nature?
6. What are the good aspects of these changes occurring?
7. What are the negative aspects of these changes? Use words from the poem to illustrate.
8. Frost uses spring turning to summer, but the gold could be leaves turning into fall. Would fall turning to winter be an equally good example? Why or why not?
9. Are the changes produced by time usually good or bad? Why?

I Could Give All To Time

To Time it never seems that he is brave
 To set himself against the peaks of snow
 To lay them level with the running wave,
 Nor is he overjoyed when they lie low,
 But only grave, contemplative and grave.

What now is inland shall be ocean isle,
 Then eddies playing round a sunken reef
 Like the curl at the corner of a smile;
 And I could share Time's lack of joy or grief
 At such a planetary change of style.

I could give all to Time except--except
 What I myself have held. But why declare
 The things forbidden that while the Customs slept
 I have crossed to Safety with? For I am There
 And what I would not part with I have kept.

1. What process is described in the first stanza?
2. How does Time view this process?
3. In line 12, the speaker says he has held things that he wouldn't want Time to change. What could these things be and how could the speaker have held them?
4. Why are Time, Safety, Customs, and There capitalized? What does it symbolize? How does it emphasize the meaning of the poem?
5. How can the speaker "keep" things from time?
6. How would you describe the personality of "Time"?
7. Why is Frost so vague in describing this scene?
8. What does this poem say about the power of Time and the power of people?
9. If you could save one thing from being changed by time, what would it be? Why?

Stopping By The Woods On a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

1. List all the strong words that set the physical scene of this poem.
2. What effect is obtained by Frost's use of mostly one-syllable words?
3. What are the pairs of opposites in this poem?
4. In different publications, Frost added or took away the comma behind "dark" in line 13. What difference would that make to the poem?
5. Is Nature a positive or negative force on the speaker? Why?
6. What kinds of exhaustion is the speaker exhibiting?
7. If the woods represented death in this poem, do you think Frost viewed it positively or negatively? Why? What aspects of the poem represent particular aspects of death?
8. Is this poem a death wish? Why?
9. Have you ever wished to be alone? How long did that wish last?
10. Does the man answer his horse's movement and leave the woodside?

For Once, Then, Something

Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs
 Always wrong to the light, so never seeing
 Deeper down in the well than where the water
 Gives me back in a shining surface picture
 Me myself in the summer heaven, godlike,
 Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.
Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,
 I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,
 Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,
 Something more of the depths--and then I lost it.
 Water came to rebuke the too clear water.
 One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple
 Shook whatever it was lay there at bottom,
 Blurred it, blotted it out. What was that whiteness?
 Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something.

1. Do you think Frost ever means to find out exactly what was at the bottom of the well?
2. Do you think the speaker is looking in the well to satisfy everyone else's curiosity or his own? Why would that make a difference?
3. Where and how is the water personified?
4. Why would the water be upset that it was too clear?
5. What could his looking into the well be a metaphor for? What should Man be searching for?
6. Is it better to see Truth or Self or a physical object like a pebble in the well bottom? Why?
7. Do you think the "whiteness" beneath the surface was meant to be something good or bad? How has Frost used colors in his other poems("Design" and "Stopping By the Woods...")?
8. It is sometimes more difficult to see beneath the surface of an issue. Is it worth the trouble to try and look beyond the superficial level?
9. If this is a metaphor for searching for the answer to life's questions, is it enough that the looker saw something or should he try to identify what he saw ? Why?

Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

1. The poem sets up a problem, interprets it, and gives a moral. Draw a line between these three sections.
2. What does the phrase "Some say" in the first line imply?
3. How does "tasted" affect the connotation of "desire"?
4. What is the tone of the speaker?
5. How does "would suffice" in the last line affect the poem?
6. Is it wrong of Frost to ask such a serious question in such a short poem? Why or why not?
7. Does Frost trivialize the subject by his choice of words? Why or why not? Give some examples if you said yes.
8. Does the shortened rhyme in the last two lines cause the reader to gloss over the point? Was this intentional on Frost's part? Why?
9. Critics say that this poem fails because it brings up a topic it doesn't explore. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
10. List all the ways you can think of to end the world. Do they fall under "fire" or "ice"?

The Oven Bird

There is a singer everyone has heard,
 Loud, a midsummer and a mid-wood bird,
 Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
 He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
 Midsummer is to spring as one to ten.
 He says the early petal-fall is past
 When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
 On sunny days a moment overcast;
 And comes that other fall we name the fall.
 He says the highway dust is over all.
 The bird would cease and be as other birds
 But that he knows in singing not to sing.
 The question that he frames in all but words
 Is what to make of a diminished thing.

1. Does the bird sing because it wants to? Which line tells you this?
2. Is the bird singing in early, middle, or late summer? Is this important to his message?
3. What do lines 4-5 mean?
4. In line 9, which "fall", first or last, is the season? What is the other one?
5. What does the highway dust symbolize?
6. What is the poem saying if the bird is supposed to represent the struggles of a poet?
7. How does a poet frame his questions without using words? Is the poet/writer sometimes reluctant to write?
8. Have you ever been unwilling to share something you feel strongly about?
9. What is the lesson of the poem if "to make" is emphasized in the last line?
10. What is the lesson of the poem if "diminished" is emphasized in the last line?

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth:

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

1. Write out, in your own words, what is being said in each stanza.
2. How much do you trust the speaker? Why?
3. What makes the chosen path a better choice? What makes the unchosen path a bad choice? Use words and phrases from the poem.
4. At the present time, how sure is the speaker that he made the right choice? Why do you know that?
5. What will cause the speaker to sigh? Is it regret? Regret at what?
6. How could you apply this story as a lesson to something in your life?
7. What life affecting decisions have you made? Did you know they'd change your life at the time?
8. Frost sent this to a friend who was known for being indecisive. Why is this appropriate?
9. Frost said about this poem, "This is tricky. Don't interpret hastily." Do you agree?
10. Why would Frost have wanted a complicated poem to seem simple when first read?

Birches

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter, darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging on them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust--
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for so long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter of fact about the ice storm,
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood

Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.
 I'd like to get away from earth awhile
 And then come back to it and begin over.
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me
 And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.
 I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

1. What is a bracken?
2. There are three sections to this poem. The first describes the scene, the second sets a metaphor, and the third draws a conclusion about the scene. Draw lines dividing these sections.
3. Why do you think Frost gave those numbers of lines to each section?
4. What words or phrases create sensory feelings?
5. How does this poem fit into the genre of pastoral poetry?
6. Does the speaker want to stay in heaven? What lines prove this?
7. How is the ice on the trees portrayed positively? How negatively?
8. What are some pairs of objects in opposition in this poem?
9. Have you ever done something you began as fun and then found out taught you a lesson?
10. If the ground was to be reality and the top of the trees human aspiration, what is the lesson of the poem? How does it describe the process of writing poetry?

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbits out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down. I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well

He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

1. Frost starts by saying "Something" doesn't love a wall. Does he ever indicate more specifically what that something is?
2. Why does the speaker fix the fence if he knows some of the rocks are going to fall down again soon?
3. What forces listed break down the wall?
4. The speaker seems to be passive, or acted upon. What other group of people mentioned in the poem are powerless participants in an action? Is this their usual role?
5. The men keep the fence between them. What does this symbolize?
6. What does Frost say about each man doing things without knowing why?
7. What reasons does the speaker give for not keeping up the fence?
8. Does Frost identify with both men? Do both of their actions seem illogical at one point or another?
9. What are the two opposing statements about wall building made in this poem?
10. If you remember the repeated phrase, "Good fences make good neighbors," how well did Frost achieve his parody? Can he still get a good effect if you don't remember the phrase?
11. Why is it important to the speaker that the neighbor reach conclusions about the wall by himself?
12. What behaviors do you do without a reason?
13. What does synecdoche mean? How does this poem do it?

Design

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
 On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
 Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth--
 Assorted characters of death and blight
 Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
 Like the ingredients of a witches' broth--
 A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
 And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
 The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
 What brought the kindred spider to that height,
 Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
 What but design of darkness to appall?--
 If design govern in a thing so small.

1. Find a picture of a heal-all. What color are they normally?
2. The three adjectives in the first line usually describe a baby. Is it a positive or negative image usually? In this case?
3. Some of the phrases in lines 4-6 make it sound like a commercial. How does this affect the tone?
4. What is the connotation of the color white in this poem?
5. Frost carefully chose to use the word "appall". Check to see what its derivative word means in Latin. How does this affect the poem's use of white in having all three characters in the death drama be white? The flower named a heal-all?
6. The poem ends with three questions. Do they suggest Frost believed in a good, bad, neutral designer, or no design at all?
7. Is Frost's conclusion upsetting? Why?
8. Is it discouraging to play a game when no one is enforcing the rules? What is your solution?
9. How is this picture of God different from the Benevolent Watchmaker Theory?
10. Is it useful for Frost to hide his message so much? How could he have said it differently?

In White

A dented spider like a snow drop white
 On a white Heal-all, holding up a moth
 Like a white piece of lifeless satin cloth--
 Saw ever curious eye so strange a sight--
 Portent in little, assorted death and blight
 Like the ingredients of a witches' broth?--
 The beady spider, the flower like a froth,
 And the moth carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
 The blue prunella every child's delight.
 What brought the kindred spider to that height?
 (Make no thesis of the miller's plight.)
 What but design of darkness and of night?
 Design, design! Do I use the word aright?

1. Why is the spider in line 11 "kindred"?
2. Read "Design", of which "In White" was an unpublished first draft. Which do you like better?
3. Which one is easier to understand? Why?
4. Which one makes its point most strongly? Why?
5. In which poem are the questions Frost poses more clear?
 As Frost was revising--
6. Which images were cut out?
7. Which images combined with others?
8. Which images added in "Design"?
9. How did the tone change?

Answers to Select Questions

The Aim Was Song

1. People warm the air they breathe in. Northern air is generally colder than Southern air.
4. Stanzas one and three describe Wind, two and four Man.
5. Northerly, cold, rough, loud, untaught
6. Southerly, song-like, organized, understanding of its goal, word, note, warm
7. Poets take raw thought and turn it into an organized poem like People supposedly took the Wind and organized it into a song.

Birches

1. a large fern
2. 1-20, 21-40, 41-59
3. Equal numbers of lines in each section balance the importance of all parts.
5. It takes relief from city life by looking at a rural setting. An allegorical lesson is drawn using a country scene. The lesson is one of traditional values.
6. No. lines 48-9, 50-2, 52-3, 58
7. Positively like a girl's golden hair, negatively as a force that breaks tree limbs
8. Spirits vs world of reality, play vs work, white birches vs dark woods, summer vs winter, heaven vs earth.
10. Nature can be the mediator to inspire humans. A poet can use poetry to bring the reader to a higher level of understanding and then return the audience back to reality after having had new "Truths" revealed to them.

Blue-Butterfly Day

1. It is only a temporary, short life.
2. snowflakes
3. He does this to show the rush of all elements of spring. The butterflies get attention first, but also die first.
4. They are not fully mature yet, and pigmented leaves are still intermixed with green leaflets.
5. They are mixed in mud on wagonwheels.
7. sky-flakes, flurry, ridden out desire, cling, freshly sliced, April mire

Bond and Free

1. part of the constellation Canis Major, Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky
2. to be in a state of slavery
3. Ithacus' father made wings for him, but he flew too close to the sun, the wax in his wings melted, and he plunged to his death for going beyond rational human limitations.
4. earthly, protected against fear, on the world's surface, owned by the world
5. dauntless, free, heavenly, traveling from star to star

6. Love is best. (See last stanza.)
7. Love=Bond, Thought=Free
8. A character or quality played off another character or quality to enhance the differences between the two.
9. Thought must be free to develop, but Love must be given or belong to someone or something before it fully exists, therefore "grounding" it somewhat.

A Cabin In the Clearing

1. Mist is the damper counterpart of smoke. It comes from the garden at night, but stays close to the ground.
2. Smoke is the guardian of starlight, comes from the chimney and is protective of the people that created it.
3. each other, Native Americans, preachers
4. history
5. People keep thinking and talking.
6. their happiness
7. The cabin dweller's neighbors are closer to each other in their ignorance than they are in physical distance.
8. Smoke comes from inside the house and is part of the people's creation.
9. They are creatures of God. ("too sudden" refers to their evolutionary appearance)
10. hearing women's as opposed to men's voices

Come In

1. the woods as a setting
2. It is too early for the bird to stop singing and too late for the bird to find somewhere else to roost.
4. light and dark, nature and man, truth and illusion, wildness and rationality
5. Speaker feels pulled into the woods, not forced to go there.
6. It is more hypnotic, consuming. The woods is not seen as such a restful place. There is more of a dark attraction to this woods.
7. the hypnotic pull of death
8. Thrush(Romanticism) tries to entice speaker(Frost), but fails.

Desert Places

1. Animals are pushed underground. Nature is not welcoming signs of life.
2. Isolated-He looks into field; he's not already in it. He also thinks the stars are trying to scare him.
3. scares/intimidates him
4. He is overcome by nature's loneliness before he even knows what's going on.
5. He views all of life apathetically and hopes for nothing better.
6. flat, uninteresting, discouraging to signs of life and interest
7. broadens the view as widely as possible
8. *Stopping* shows a gentle, seductive, hypnotic, inviting woods; *Desert* shows a cold, isolated, negative unwelcoming forest

Design

1. Heal-alls are usually blue or violet.
2. Although usually positive, the spider is a negative character in this poem.
3. mocking, lighter tone to this poem.
4. negative connotation
5. "to become white" Appall is usually used to denote the emotion of shock and the lesson suggested by these little white characters is shocking.
6. bad or none at all
9. The God portrayed here isn't benevolent in either case and in the "no design at all" option, not even a watchmaker--one who sets the world in motion with an initial order inherent in it.

Fire and Ice

1. Lines 1-2, 2-7, 8-9
2. It implies a colloquial, uneducated speaker whose opinions on academic matters should not be trusted.
3. It raises the question, can desire really be known if it's only tasted?
4. casual
5. It trivializes the end of the world

Forgive O Lord

1. pleading, reverent
2. accusing, irreverent
3. poems, sins, omissions of good deeds, secret bad deeds
4. life's daily hardships, the difficulties of being human or having a conscience
5. satirically irreverent. While he capitalizes "thee" and "thy" and uses "O Lord" when asking for forgiveness, he irreverently suggests that his experience as a human being is a big joke.

For Once, Then, Something

2. You can discuss one's self-motivated search for Truth or just catalogue facts. Why is learning important?
3. Line 11, protective
4. It doesn't want to reveal the secret it hides.
5. a search for truth, personal knowledge, physical objects
7. He uses white ambivalently. It could be good, bad, or unknown which could be transcendent or terrifying or just nothingness.
8. Doing so will allow one to find more than a temporary solution.

Good-by and Keep Cold

1. a reddish-brown game bird with a plump body
2. If the trees warm and sap begins to flow, the trees become very susceptible to frostbite.
3. In the end, he has no control.
6. Yes. Even though he imbues the trees with human traits, he realizes they are not human, yet he cares for them deeply.
8. Religious--he leaves room for divine intervention.

Good Hours

1. By doing so, he provides a sharp contrast between his loneliness and the inanimate objects he finds company from.
2. heavy use of detail, more than one sense evoked
3. He wanted to get away from people. He really didn't want to talk with anyone.
4. The sound broke the town's silence and disturbed its peacefulness, at least to him.
5. No. See stanza 3 and question 3.
6. He wants to feel a part of the town only to the extent that he chooses. He wants to participate without invasion of his own privacy.

I Could Give All To Time

1. the melting of mountain snows into streams and rivers
2. with indifference
3. landscapes, relationships, his feelings, attitudes, and emotions
4. They represent symbolic qualities. It gives the poem a more universal theme by expanding the work's focus to include all people who have wanted to stop the effects of time on anyone or anything.
5. by protecting what used to be in his memory (Answers may vary.)
6. impersonal, indifferent, unemotional
7. to keep it universal
8. People can overcome Time if they try hard enough, but Time and Change will win unless people make an active and conscious effort to overcome them.

In A Disused Graveyard

1. If used as an adjective, it means to be unmoving. People are still very scared by death, and the poem has a more serious tone.
If it is used as an adverb, people still come to visit the graves, but aren't necessarily scared by the thought of them, and the tone of the poem is less fearful and more serious.
2. It isn't currently being filled.
3. They aren't fearful of death and wonder why people are afraid.
4. The speaker has projected his own fears and discomfort onto the tombstones.
5. The only visitors who still care to come are people who will soon die--the old and sick.

The Lockless Door

1. The shorter, more driving rhythm demonstrates a less serious theme.
2. casual, humorous
3. He is a caged animal.
4. He would have to gain the courage to confront his fears. There are many ways for this to happen.
5. He is hoping to be saved from the confrontation.

Love and a Question

2. whether or not to let the stranger stay the night
3. to protect his bride from any negative aspects of the world
4. The environment of the house would be intruded upon.
5. The couple would have to share their space and lifestyle with someone, especially someone who may not respect their new love.
6. the needs of society
7. the needs of the individual
8. There are no definite guidelines to what is right and wrong about personal versus group needs.

Mending Wall

1. No.
2. It is important to go through the ritual.
3. ground, hunters, unnamed forces of nature
4. The hunters acting on the wishes of the dogs.
5. Frost "rides the fence" about which man he favors. The arguments for/against both are equal.
6. He implies that the neighbor is a hypocrite, but also joins the man in rebuilding the fence.
7. The neighbor doesn't know why they fix the wall. Apple trees and pine cones won't move.
8. Yes. Why does the neighbor keep up the fence? Why does the speaker help if he really does object?
9. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" and "good fences make good neighbors"
10. There is only a hypocritical point of view with no real reasons given. The effect of the poem is lessened if the key phrases aren't remembered.
11. If someone learns a lesson by themselves, they retain it much longer than if it's forced on them.
13. The concept of the part equaling the whole is seen here. The wall symbolizes Society's struggle with ritual and convention and whether to speak out against it or not, whether to stay isolated from it or not, and how to relate to other people.

Misgiving

2. The leaves have been waiting for a chance to be blown around, but once that chance comes, they give it up, no longer enthusiastic.
3. people
4. God/a spiritual force
5. Sometimes people respond dully to opportunities they have previously fought adamantly for.

A Mood Apart

1. Lines 1-3-enjoying private time, 4-6-intruded upon, 7-8-upset about the intrusion
2. The boys are watching.
3. church music
4. down on my knees, sotto chants
5. The boys interrupted something spiritual.

Neither Far Out Nor In Deep

1. something that prevents or obstructs an action
2. Poem catches the reader in its oscillations back and forth and then continues them at shorter intervals.
3. It's use is ironic because all the people are looking, but no one is really seeing.
4. gull, ship
5. Today, the search for Truth or great meanings to life can be found in scientific study as well as philosophy.
8. No area of unclarity can be illuminated by the people who are looking at it.
9. The people looking at the water don't have the skills to see this particular problem clearly.
10. The search needs to be given a rest so that a new perspective can present itself.
11. a belief that life is senseless and useless. If life has no sense or guiding principle, no amount of looking or study will reveal one.

Not To Keep

1. He's a soldier being sent back to the war.
2. Frost achieves a sense of disbelief and joy on the part of the woman at discovering the man's return home. She is also hesitant to discover the bad news inherent in a soldier's wartime return home from the front.
3. She wants to ask/does ask initially when he arrives. She wasn't answered, so continues to ask, (at least in her mind) about what happened to him.
4. She had let her love go to the war; he had come back safe. They were lucky to be safe and happy, free to love each other.
5. He had a wound sufficient to be sent home to recuperate, yet not serious enough to let him stay there until the war ended.

6. Line ten--"they" doesn't refer to the army; it refers to the two lovers. The army views the man as just another soldier. His private life is no concern of the governments, so the two lovers become a "they" to someone in the government.
7. If she helps him get better, they'll just send him back to war. If she doesn't, she'll be hurting him herself.

Nothing Gold Can Stay

1. Lines 1-5, 6-8
2. The promise of the first spring growth is a golden promise. OR New leaves are yellowish-green, or gold.
3. Promise must be fulfilled or new leaves giveaway to full, green leaves.
5. Nothing at all stays, Eden and dawn leave, too.
7. too brief, Eden's fall, colors of dawn fade
8. No. That loss of promise wouldn't be as strong an image with fall turning to winter.

The Objection To Being Stepped On

1. satirical
2. his derrière
3. premeditation
4. He doesn't advocate it. He'd rather see tools used as weapons.
5. A stockpile of weapons is always wise.

On A Bird Singing In Its Sleep

1. after line 8
2. in the middle of the night (lunar noon)
3. it only sang once, wasn't sitting high up in the trees, threw its cares away from itself, stopped before it annoyed anyone
4. a space between two close things
5. If singing would have caused the bird's predators to emerge and kill it, it wouldn't have sung in the first place.
6. People are much below the wisdom of Nature.
7. ex: *The Aim Was Song* Answers will vary.
8. It enjoys its song, is in little serious danger, and enlightens the humans.

The Onset

1. snowfalls, a sign of the "dead season" of winter
3. winter-same, hissing(on green ground), visually overpowering, an attempt at death
4. Winter has often tried to kill everything, but has never succeeded.
5. Spring conquers the death of winter. Snow melts to fill streams, while only trees and houses remain white.
6. a very small brook

7. a tall fern with compound leaves
8. circular images, a return to the beginning of the poem, a reminder that winter snow will always return

The Oven Bird

1. No. lines 11-12
2. Late. He's saying the prime of his life has passed.
3. The leaves are changing color and there are only one tenth the flowers now that there were in the spring.
4. Last=season fall. First=fall of humanity. This is the most obvious allegory in the poem.
5. Industrialism is covering Nature and choking it off or masking the truth.
6. Poets must write to reveal great truths about life, even when they don't want to.
7. Presents issues without directly asking about them. Yes, sometimes no one wants to ask the tough questions.
9. We can change the world.
10. The world is less than it once was--can we hope to alter it?

A Passing Glimpse

1. He's sure he's seeing some kind of flowers, but doesn't think they are the types he has named them as being.
3. No.
6. Some will want to know if they were right. Some will say they wouldn't want to know if they were wrong.
7. What if great discoveries are being made and are forgotten before they can be explored?

The Road Not Taken

- 1-5. These questions are somewhat tricky and are meant to lead the student to a particular conclusion. It's not so important what the answers are as it is that they support their thoughts.
8. The sigh in line 5 was meant to mock the speaker's indecision. The whole poem, according to Frost, was about a man who couldn't decide and always dwelt on what might have been.
10. Frost was a trickster and often tried to hide his poem's meaning.

The trick to this poem is that no conclusive evidence exists for claiming one path as better than the other or that the speaker was sure of his decision at the time he made it. It only seems as if there is evidence given, while a good look at the poem shows there is no difference.

Rose Pogonias

2. There seemed to be one flower for every blade of grass.
3. The couple hope that either the clearing will be forgotten at mowing time or the mower will wait until the flowers thin before they mow the grass in order to save the flowers.
4. Many answers are possible. ex: to take a memento of their discovery
5. temple, bowed, worship, wings, prayer, grace of hours
6. Time seems frozen. Things of great beauty often seem to suspend time or slow it down.

Stopping By the Woods On a Snowy Evening

2. Monosyllabism creates a hypnotic effect.
3. dark woods and white snow, man who owns woods and speaker, horse and speaker
4. Without the comma, dark and deep modifies lovely, creates a more seductive woods. With the comma, the three adjectives become a list.
5. It is positive. They are ready to give him what he wants.
6. emotional, physical, mental
7. positively--He has to be drawn away from the woods. The darkest evening is like the time of death or low point in depression. The horse and its shaking bells are the call of loved ones and responsibilities. The snow's soft sounds are an easy death or peaceful environment.

Storm Fear

1. The speaker is disoriented and thrown off balance. The lines and rhythms reflect his fear and irrationality.
2. being trapped by the storm
4. anger, attacking stance
5. He's struggling with a fear that the family may or may not survive the storm.
6. Trouble comes in doubting that he'll survive at all. His fear is over the question's mere existence, not its possible answers.
7. downed communication lines, snow muting their cries for help
8. Home is a refuge.

To A Moth Seen In Winter

1. Lines 1-6. 7-18, 19-24
2. He wishes he were as familiar with moths as he is with flowers. He could then identify this moth.
3. the great amount of flying he's doing
4. love, another moth
6. Speaker must concentrate on saving his own life for the time-being.
7. People sometimes waste their efforts, but God doesn't step in and directly affect the human plight. The question of whether or not God quits caring for humans or not and if this is an accurate portrayal of God is up to student interpretation.

Questions for Discussion and Testing

"I prefer synecdoche in poetry--that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole." Name an example from the poems we've studied that shows this quality.

"The object in writing poetry is to make all poems sound as different as possible from each other." Do you agree or disagree that Frost does this? Give a pair of poems that illustrate both points of view no matter what you think.

Frost said he would as soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down. Respond.

"There are only two meters in English, strict iambic and loose iambic. Do you agree. Find an example of a successful poem that is not iambic. Why is it successful?

Write out a poem in prose(not caring when the lines end). Set it aside for a few days and read it without strict line structure. Do you put the accents in different places than where the poem dictates? What are the differences if the poem is read in its true line form? Are these differences vital to the poem's meaning?

Good writers break the rules, but break them well. Frost has rules. State one. Give an example of a poem in which he breaks this rule. How did he break it? Why do you think he broke it? Was the poem more successful this way?

Pick two poems(or look at two provided). How are they related? How do they contrast or show two sides of the same issue?

Trespass

1. arrogant, threatening
2. a group of extinct sea water arthropods(bugs)
3. He could do many things to harm the grounds. If the landowner is not vigilant, he won't know what the visitor is up to.
4. rocks or sea creatures(crabs) as specimens
5. The visitor acknowledged that the landowner was master of the property and all on it because without the landowner's permission, he couldn't even have a simple thing like a glass of water.

Two Leading Lights

1. favorably
2. satisfied, power, greatness, restraint, Solomon
3. unfavorably
4. light, grace, never learned her place, whimsical, lunatic, Sheba, irresponsible, unpredictable, presuming
5. condescending